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By

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Capstone Approval Page

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ABSTRACT

In conjunction with an exhibition of watercolor paintings entitled *Endangered Landscapes: Painting in the Aux Sable Creek Watershed*, study was made of the issues involved in the destruction of the rural agricultural landscape for the construction of new homes, businesses, and industry. A research paper on "Suburban Sprawl: Its Origins, the Problems and Some Possible Solutions" broadly outlines the concerns with the trend in areas of prime farmland of the Midwest, specifically in the rural fringe of the Chicago metropolitan area.

The watercolor paintings were for the most part painted on site ("en plein aire") at locations in the watershed of the pristine Aux Sable Creek in Kendall County that are targeted for development. This area is currently agricultural but much of it is in a planning area of the city of Joliet. The paintings, each 22" by 30" or larger, were photographed; photos of the paintings and the educational materials in the exhibit are included with this report. Also included is a journal kept during the painting process and photographs of the mounted exhibition and gallery opening reception in the Nature Museum Gallery of the Kendall County Forest Preserve at the Historic Kendall County Courthouse, Yorkville, Illinois.

USOAR GRANT END REPORT

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

February 25, 2003

ENDANGERED LANDSCAPES: PAINTING IN THE AUX SABLE CREEK WATERSHED

Kellogg Farm, Watercolor, 22"x 30"

CARLA TAYLOR

[redacted]

Spring Morning on Seward Mound

The Seward Mound Cemetery lies just north of Minooka on Wildey Road, a quiet beautiful spot surrounded by farmland. Much of the neighboring land is planned for development. This land is part of a glacial Moraine that runs from Minooka to Oswego. Note the grass waterways in the field at the right to prevent soil erosion. (For those who can't get their bearings or think something is missing in the landscape, the tall radio tower along Ridge Road is "hiding behind the tree trunk.)

View from Seward Mound

From this elevation in southern Seward Township, looking west, one can see perhaps half way across Kendall County. Many native trees line the banks of the Aux Sable, protecting the flood plain from erosion. All branches of the creek – Eastern, Western and Central – merge in Seward Township. The Lisbon Center grain elevators along Route 47 appear in the distance.

The Testin Farm

Close to the intersection of Ridge Road and Caton Farm Road, this farm is now next-door neighbor to the City of Joliet and the new Plainfield South High School. Development is being planned for much of the surrounding land.

Growing corn, soybeans, wheat and cattle, the land slopes slowly to the south, with a trickle of a stream beginning that will feed into the East Branch of the Aux Sable Creek.

Farm Fact: Water run-off from development often adversely affects farmland that previously had no flooding problems.

Testin Farm #2

I set up to paint with a beautiful golden wheat field before me. Returning on a subsequent evening to continue the painting, I found the wheat field had been cut – before I had painted it! It was baling day.

Farm Fact: From studies completed by American Farmland Trust, the median cost of services for each tax dollar generated is:
Residential --- $1.15
Farm / Forest / Open land --- $.36
Residential development does not generate enough taxes for required services, but is supported by taxes paid by commercial/industrial and agricultural property.

View from McDaniel's Horse Corral

Except for the biting flies, I especially enjoyed painting at this location. A couple of horses kept wandering in front of me, trying to get in the picture, but wouldn't stand still long enough for me to paint them. The view here is gorgeous at sunset with the stand of cottonwood trees set against a backdrop of woods along the Aux Sable. A sign along the road informs that this is the future site of Minooka Ridge Business Park. Interstate 80 is nearby.

Farmland that is converted to urban use – roof tops, roads, and sidewalks, becomes more impervious to water. Rainfall is not allowed to soak into the ground, but guided into storm sewers and waterways that are then prone to flooding. This "efficient" drainage leads to depletion of the area's aquifers and available water.

View East from Kellogg Pond

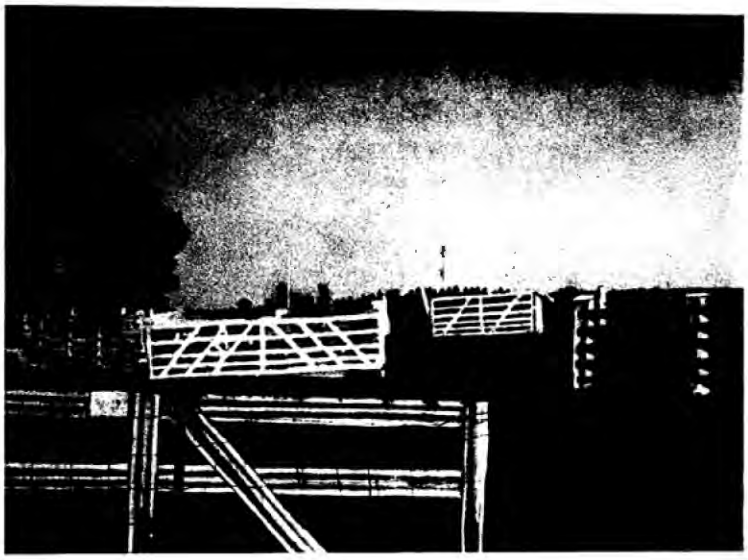
This painting was done looking east from the Kellogg farm pond at Walker and Schlapp Roads. Ridge Road lies just beyond the trees on the horizon. The creek and pond together create a favorite stopping place for White Egrets and Great Blue Herons, among many other kinds of water fowl. Red-winged Blackbirds nest in the filter strip along the creek.

Kellogg Farm Machine Shed

After a couple of evenings painting "View East from Kellogg Pond", I suddenly noticed the beautiful scene just to my right and decided I had to paint it also. Although it may not quite be an "endangered" landscape, increasingly busy Caton Farm Road lies in the background. The Kellogg farm is a Sesquicentennial Farm, homesteaded in February of 1846 by George Washington Kellogg. Six generations of the Kelloggs have farmed here: George, Alvin, Bert, Keith, John and Matt.

The Kellogg farm, because of its proximity to new development on Joliet's far west side, became an agricultural district in 1998.

Forming an agricultural district is a tool used to aid in farmland protection. It is essentially a public statement that the land is intended to remain agricultural for a period of ten years, subject to County approval. An agricultural district offers some financial protection for farmland in the event a municipality annexes adjacent land. Utilities cannot assess the farmland for sewer lies and water, unless the farmer chooses access.



Cattle Gates
Soltwisch Farm
(Looking towards Seward Mound)

Just north of the village of Minooka much of the surrounding farmland is being planned for development.

Farm Fact: According to Dr. Richard Greene (Dept. of Geography, N.I.U.), farmland that is converted to urban uses in the Midwest is generally matched by the conversion of rangeland to cropland in the west, where irrigation to grow crops is a necessity. Water shortages further west are becoming a major problem.

Eastern Skyline

This painting is approximately the same view as "After the Storm", but from a couple fields away and at a different time of year. The cottonwood trees are without their leaves and the pine trees can be seen now following the creek line. The little white "omney" V.O.R. station on the right guides aircraft in the Chicago region.

The Henneberry Farm
Grove Road

Although this may not be as much of an "endangered Landscape" as others in this collection, the farm is on the northern edge of the Aux Sable Creek watershed. Its elevation allows one to see much of the creek's "valley" to the southeast.

Farm Fact: The loss of farmland in Kendall County did not really begin to occur until the late 1980s when the total amount of farmland was 186,440 acres. (Kendall County's total acreage: 205,440) By 1997, there were 167,486 acres of farmland – a 19,000 acre drop.

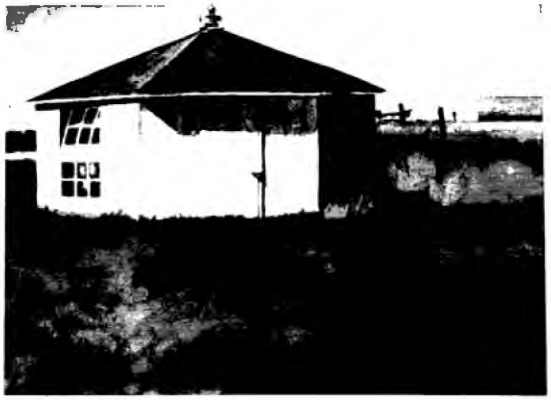
Between 1987-1992...1,644 average annual loss
Between 1992-1997...2,147 average annual loss

U.S. Census of Agriculture

Projecting the loss of land in farms to 2002, assuming the increasing trend of approximately 500 acres per year for the five year period, the average annual rate would be approximately 2,650 acres.

After Note

While the artist thought this property was not as "endangered" as some of the others she painted, this unfortunately is not so. Developers have presented plans to the Oswego Planning Commission for the development of the Henneberry Farm and for all practical purposes can be considered gone.



Olson's Chicken Coop

This building is no longer at the original site, but has been moved. It was painted from a photo taken by the artist in the late 1970's. Many old farm structures are of no real use anymore, making it impractical to invest in their upkeep.

After the Storm

Cottonwood trees and a generous conservation planting of pine trees along the eastern branch of the Aux Sable provide a beautiful setting for some great evening skies. From this vantage point, on McKanna Road, the full moon rising can also be seen, often taking center stage in the opening between the trees.

Path to the Pond

The farm pond that lies just ahead is not visible, but what motivated me to paint this was the deep brown color of the soil in the surrounding fields, that had recently been turned over. Across the field ahead lies Caton Farm Road. Trees along the Central Aux Sable are on the left.

It takes about 500 years to form an inch of soil.

Bean Field and Woods

(Along the Aux Sable's central branch)

Conservation practices, such as using grass filter strips and riparian forest corridors can prevent excessive soil erosion. Conventional farming can see a loss of five tons of soil per acre per year. Erosion rates have decreased with the use of no-till systems.

The project Endangered Landscapes: Painting in the Aux Sable Creek Watershed has turned out to be one of the most rewarding activities I have undertaken. The gallery exhibition, consisting of fifteen watercolors from 2002, actually exceeded expectations and has launched new opportunities and ideas for further work with this subject matter. I have included photos of several of the paintings on the final page.

The painting got off to a rocky start in the first week of May when I was suddenly afflicted with a virus that attacked my joints, mostly in my wrists and fingers. By the end of June, however, I was almost fully recovered and painting the rest of the summer was an enjoyable experience. I did, though, run out of time to paint all the places that I had planned to.

I kept a journal of my on-site painting experiences and kept a scrapbook consisting mostly of newspaper articles dealing with the area's coming housing and commercial developments and related environmental issues. I used this project as the foundation for an Honors capstone and, in the hopes of learning more about the issues surrounding the loss of farmland and increasing development, wrote a research paper on "Suburban Sprawl: Its Origins, Problems and Possible Solutions." I met several times with Dr. Richard Greene of N.I.U.'s Geography Department, who provided me with information, ideas and related literature dealing with my topic. He gave my name to Brad Walker of American Farmland Trust who was attempting to organize a citizens group in Kendall County, as he has done in Boone and DeKalb counties, to address farmland loss and growth issues. I attended those meetings, the first few of which were informative and educational; subsequent meetings have been concerned with building a viable citizens group. The group has expressed interest in using some of my work for this project for educational use and to develop a logo.

Towards the end of August, at the end of my painting days, my watercolor instructor and faculty supervisor, Professor Charlotte Rollman, came to visit at my home, reviewing and critiquing my work and helping me with framing and exhibition questions. We spent the afternoon painting at one of the "endangered" sites.

Instead of having the frames custom-made, I decided I could frame and show more paintings (and learn more) if I did much of the framing work myself. So, on the advice of Professor Rollman, I ordered good raw oak frame "kits" (precut lumber) and learned to build them myself – spending much time sanding, staining and finishing them to my own satisfaction. Although there was a large time investment in the frames, they were quite professional looking and I was happy with the uniformity they provided for the show. I also cut my own mats. By the time the show was hung, I was feeling that I was quite an expert watercolor framer, having learned tremendously through countless mistakes.

I was able to frame fifteen of my paintings, a few of which were from my previous semester of watercolor painting but were also in the Aux Sable watershed's "endangered" area. I also framed a map of the watershed with my painting locations designated and framed another large "hot off the press" map provided by American Farmland Trust entitled "Farming on the Edge." This map is an eye-opener, showing the state of the nation's high quality farmland. One can see that the areas of high quality farmland are relatively quite limited, but there is a high rate of development in many of those areas. The "Farming on the Edge" map hung in between two paintings from the

farm that lies directly on the western edge of the City of Joliet. There were also notations concerning each painting location exhibited below the painting, including educational "Farm Facts." Many informational materials and handouts related to farmland loss were available in the exhibit, including copies of an article by Dr. Greene on farmland conversion and small versions of the "Farming on the Edge" map.

The watercolor exhibit was hung in the Olde Courthouse Gallery at the Kendall County Forest Preserve in the Historic Courthouse in Yorkville and has been seen by many more people than we (including the administrator of the nature museum) had originally envisioned. Over 200 people attended the opening reception and many others came subsequently to see the exhibition. The show was advertised continually in the Arts and Entertainment section of the county newspapers for its duration. It was highlighted in the fall issue of *Stepping Stones*, the newsletter of the Kendall County Forest Preserve District. The Forest Preserve (coincidentally) decided to put a five million-dollar open space referendum on the November ballot and won approval by a wide margin. I believe that the show helped to educate the public as to the importance of preserving open space areas in this county. I also think the art helped aid a momentum building that mobilized a citizens group to pressure Joliet to change their plans concerning their desire to build a sewage treatment plant on the banks of the Aux Sable and put the effluent into the small creek. Joliet claims it will no longer do so and is, albeit reluctantly, looking into alternatives that are more environmentally sound.

An added plus for the project was that the Kendall County Board began having its regular meetings at the Historic Courthouse in a room just off the main hall where the painting exhibit hung. In this way the show reached its most desired "target" audience – county planners and developers. In fact, a county board member purchased one of the paintings. As I was taking the exhibit down, the Board happened to be in session. I learned from the newspaper the next day they had passed a resolution opposing the proposed sewage treatment plant on the creek.

Although the watercolor show exhibit was meant to be primarily educational, by its end in mid-January every painting had been sold. The Forest Preserve purchased one of the paintings (the one on the show card) for its newly begun permanent collection. I have become a "Friend of the Olde Courthouse Gallery," helping the nature museum administrator with future shows, hangings and receptions. In February, the administrator asked me to accompany her, with a couple of my paintings, to be on the local WAUR-TV station to publicize the activities in the newly formed gallery. There, on "Fox Valley Today," I was given an opportunity to talk about the grant I received from N.I.U. and the reeently completed painting project. That was a great learning experience in itself!

This project was in my opinion a great success. Through trial and error, and frankly, many stressful moments, I learned much that will help me with painting and framing problems in the future. A photographer, Paul Burd, another "Friend of the Olde Courthouse Gallery," volunteered to make transparencies of the paintings at cost so that prints could be made from them in the future. So, as the show ended in January and the paintings have been dispersed, this project is not coming to an end but seems to be only the beginning stage of a venture that I may work on for the rest of my life. Thank you for this great opportunity!

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

THE SCHOOL OF ART

HONORS CAPSTONE THESIS

TO ACCOMPANY THE SHOW OF

ENDANGERED LANDSCAPES: PAINTING IN THE AUXSABLE CREEK WATERSHED

SUBURBAN SPRAWL: ITS ORIGINS, THE PROBLEMS AND SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

BY

CARLA TAYLOR

[redacted]

AUGUST 2002

Something has been eating away at America's fertile countryside for some time now, and the something has finally been recognized and named. Not an out-and-out villain, because the intentions are often good and reasonable, "suburban sprawl" is being viewed as having an increasingly unhealthy appetite. There comes a point sometimes when growth becomes excessive and restraint for the sake of good health is in order. Also called "urban sprawl," suburban sprawl reflects the fact that the old urban centers have been left far behind and it is the suburbs themselves that have developed the ravenous appetite. There are many problems becoming apparent with the way the countryside has been developed in the last few decades: environmental, cultural, social, logistical and even psychological.[1] There are also, happily, some solutions to the problems, although they will necessarily have to be put into effect, actualized. Changes will not simply be wished into existence. In this discussion, the intention is to look especially at rural urban fringe areas of metropolitan Chicagoland.

"Sprawl" is variously defined as to spread out – erratically, irregularly, ungracefully, awkwardly and carelessly. None of these words carry any sense of a plan or a proper sense of order. That is the main problem with sprawl – it is a stretching out that is taking up an inordinate amount of space which translates into, particularly in the Midwest, a great loss of prime farmland. However, suburban sprawl can be hard to define or characterize exactly. What one person might call suburban sprawl could be another's beautiful home and wooded subdivision. A judge's comment many years ago concerning his ruling on obscenity could apply to suburban sprawl: "I don't know how to define it but I know it when I see it." The matter can become quite subjective; generally, simple growth of a city or town is technically not suburban sprawl. There are, however, some

common characteristics that have been identified as part of the problem. These would include "'leap frog development,' commercial strips along roads and large expanses of low density or single-family developments that isolate living, working and shopping from each other."[2] Others would perhaps add big box chain stores, oversized parking lots and oversized roads. Roadways become wider and wider – some boasting five lanes going in a single direction so one will never have to sit long at a stoplight.

How did this development pattern come to be? Generally speaking, it all started after World War II when tracts and tracts of homes were built in the countryside around existing towns and cities in order to accommodate returning soldiers and their new families. The automobile made the suburbs possible; one did not have to live as close to one's job anymore. All the homes could be parked together in a more remote area and workers could commute to their jobs in the city. It became undesirable to actually live in the city – especially to raise children. Cities became darker in the 1800s and, particularly in Europe, were "shrouded in the smoke of Blake's 'dark Satanic mills.' "[3] They had truly, in places, become unlivable. Thus,

> The successes of turn-of-the-century planning became the foundation of a new profession, and ever since, planners have repeatedly attempted to relive that moment of glory by separating everything from everything else. This segregation, once applied to only incompatible uses, is now applied to every use.[4]

The family car was being touted as the answer to the problem of living apart from work, shops and schools. In 1922, Henry Ford had declared: "We shall solve the City Problem by leaving the City."[5] And his great automobile venture was launched, the nation bought into the idea (leaving mass transit behind in the dust of the automobile) and we, as a nation, have been leaving the city in droves ever since. But with our cars to take

us back whenever we like. The countryside and the small town became the desired place to live.

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Why has sprawl become so pervasive in our society? Apparently – it is said – that is what we want and how we prefer to live. There are many and various reasons for all this development, some of them quite logical. A house in the suburbs is a much-coveted possession, conferring status and, often, a sense of well being and safety. What has been called "the lure of the white picket fence" [6] does have great drawing power. There are definite advantages to living in the suburbs – provided that one is adequately equipped. For it is also true that "in suburbia, there is only one available lifestyle: to own a car and to need it for everything."[7] So, granted that one does have access to that all-important mode of transport, suburban life can be good.

Leaving the city behind is a major motivating factor in unchecked development. It seems it is easier to leave the city than to fix it. While it is often not acknowledged openly, racism often plays a part in the desire to leave. "White flight" contributes greatly to urban blight.[8] According to F.J.Popper (quoted in Suburban Nation):

> The basic purpose of zoning was to keep Them where They belonged – Out. If They had already gotten in, then its purpose was to confine them to limited areas. The exact identity of Them varied a bit around the country. Blacks, Latinos, and poor people qualified. Catholics, Jews, and Orientals were targets in many places.[9]

While it is true that crime rates are much higher in the city, many blame much of the increases in crime on the abandonment of urban areas. Those who can afford to leave do so, leaving the remaining poor with limited educational opportunities, limited means of employment and the resultant frustration and increased poverty. The crime rate

progressively drops as one travels out from the central city, so the tendency is, for those who are able, to live as far from the central city as they can. As schools lose their funding in the inner city and begin to crumble, the suburbs gain more inhabitants. This problem is discussed in the book Once There Were Greenfields, the Surface Transportation Policy Project of the Natural Resources Defense Council:

> The desire of homebuyers to choose locations with good housing and good schools is understandable and cannot be underestimated. Moreover, for those with means, the choice can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: as middle- and upper-income taxpayers flee cities and inner suburbs, the places to which they flee soon become the only places with sufficient tax bases to support a good public school system. The prophecy may not be fulfilled indefinitely, however, since eventually the new communities mature and begin to take on the problems previously associated only with the original, "old" communities. As those with the means move even farther out, the pattern repeats.[10]

According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the population of Chicago has been declining since 1950 while the population in urban fringe areas (Chicago's suburbs) has grown from 25% to 37%.[11] Each year, from 1988 to 1996, central cities in the U.S. lost over two million people, while the suburbs in those same years gained between two to three million people.[12]

Southwest of Chicago, Joliet's west side is expanding rapidly, with large and sprawling development of single family homes, into previously agricultural land. The intersection of Route 59 and Caton Farm Road, with a new department store, Jewel-Osco, gas stations and strip mall is the site of much new traffic congestion. Caton Farm Road, only a few years ago a rather quiet country road, is now the feeder road for many new housing developments. A woman from the newly developed area, visiting a farm a few miles away, exclaimed that she wished she could live in such a place – where she wasn't constantly bumping elbows with her neighbors. When asked where she moved from, her

answer was Cicero, an inner suburb, and her guess was that maybe 85% of her current neighbors (now all Plainfield residents) were also from Cicero and its environs. It appears that as the people move farther out, sadly, the problems also come with. As the mayor of Oswego, Craig Weber, has so aptly put it: "Everyone wants to move here for the small-town atmosphere, and they don't want anyone else to come, but they want to come." And by the time everyone comes, the small-town atmosphere has moved away.

Probably the single greatest cause of the flight to the country and suburbs is the loss of the manufacturing base. A factory or industrial center, such as a steel mill, provides a central core around which employees tend to live. With the shifting to a service economy rather than manufacturing, jobs tend to move and migrate with the population. There is no longer as much capital invested heavily in one specific place close to workers. Often the capital also moves outwards and away from the city's center, following the pool of workers, as Motorola expands from Schaumburg into Harvard, a further suburb, and Sears moves from its Sears Tower downtown to Hoffman Estates.[13] Harvard is actually a rather sobering example of what can happen to a community when the major employer begins to outsource its production line. When Motorola moved many of its manufacturing lines outside of the U.S., the newly developed area around Harvard was left high and dry, with high unemployment and empty shops. Rapid growth in an area, even in new suburbs, can be stopped dead in its tracks by a move of the major employer. Besides the shift to a service economy, there is also a growing information-based economy that is dispersing the workforce even more readily.[14] The computer, the fax machine and the telecommunications industry allows businesses to employ workers in

even remote and rural areas besides the suburbs. Thus, a stockbroker can have an office at home many miles from any city or town.

One of the more surprising reasons for sprawl but one that seems quite obvious, when one comes to think about it, is America's high divorce rate. Single-parent households almost doubled between the years 1970 and 1990, with the number of dependent children per household in decline. The number of households is growing dramatically faster than the population. Wherever there is a single parent heading a household, there is often another non-custodial parent living elsewhere. In the Chicago area alone, single-parent households create an additional 350,000 households.[15]

Coincidentally, in a work of imaginative fiction entitled The Great Divorce, author C.S. Lewis described hell as a gray, featureless town that goes on and on, where walking would never bring one to the better part of town. From the air one could see no fields, rivers or mountains but only a gray town that filled the whole field of vision. People would quarrel with their neighbors and build a new house on the edge of town, leaving empty, deserted streets and houses behind.[16]

Midwesterners do love their open space and spacious homes. But rather than preserving open space in common and clustering homes closer together, we carve up the landscape, creating little spaces for everyone – which translates into large lot, low density subdivisions. These are generally seen as a "good"; it is assumed that the property tax on such homes will increase revenues of the local taxing bodies and pay for the services needed for those homes. It is erroneously believed by some that those homes will pay more in taxes than the previous farmland. What is forgotten is that the farmland needed

very little in the way of public services. And that it often freely provided public services such as floodwater control and aquifer replenishment. Residential property uses $1.14 of every dollar generated for public services. Farmland uses 38¢. Thus, farmland is subsidizing homes; houses do not bring in the tax revenues – they consume them.[17] Increasing tax revenues is a major goal for municipalities. The problem is that large lot, low-density single-family homes are the greatest threat to the Midwest's prime agricultural lands, taking up the most space per capita. According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, over 400 square miles of farmland were converted to residential use in the Chicago metropolitan area between 1970 and 1990. And in the ten years since and currently, the bulldozers on prime agricultural lands seem to be on the increase.

Kendall County, not really a "collar county" (adjacent to Cook County), but steadily beginning to look like one, is still predominantly rural (80%). This small county just west of Aurora and Joliet is now under attack by the development forces. Aurora has been expanding into Kendall County for years in the north; Joliet has recently begun expanding into the county in the southern agricultural area. Joliet's expansion plans run to Route 47, nearly in the center of the county. Joliet's plans, funded by the riverboat casinos, also include a new sewage treatment plant on the small AuxSable Creek. Kendall County, insisting that the pristine creek be protected and arguing that the county's land use plan designates the southern part of the county to remain agricultural, wonders how best to battle the urban encroachment. Yet another threat to the heart of Kendall County's prime farmland is the proposed Prairie Pathway, a limited access link between I-88 and I-80 that many fear will fuel urban sprawl throughout the county.

The small towns of the county are becoming quite large – Oswego especially – and public services are under strain. Schools, the water department, the park district, the fire department and the "village" of Oswego are all seeking solutions to their problems of rapid growth. In a recent editorial, Roger Matile, the editor of the local paper (the Ledger-Sentinel) tried to explain why they can't say "no" to developers. After stating that local officials at the township, county and municipal levels no more want this rampant growth than anyone else, he explains why their hands are tied:

> So why do they keep approving all this development? Why can't they declare a moratorium and fight developers in court? The answers to those questions go back decades when farmers successfully persuaded the Kendall County Board to allow subdivision of unproductive farmland into home lots. Those pockets of residentially-zoned land sited willy-nilly throughout Kendall County become part of the legal basis for adjacent residential zoning. The legal rights of property owners are well established, and if someone wants to build homes beside other homes, the courts have repeatedly ruled they can. Court challenges can be made, but are almost always futile and a waste of tax dollars.[18]

Another factor that adds fuel to sprawl is the strong attachment to landowners' property rights. Most states, including Illinois, back off on the issue of tighter control of land use, preferring to leave things under local control. Local officials, however, can often be quite intimidated and pressured by large development forces, such as Inland Corporation or Wal-Mart representatives. Among the most vociferous to defend their property rights are farmers themselves, who may have made very little in income in a lifetime of farming and, needing to retire or pay medical bills, sell their land. And they have a right to sell their land to anyone -- who will likely be the one willing to pay the most money for it. This will probably not be another farmer, but an investor or even a developer, if that land is anywhere close to a municipality that is seeking to expand. It is often very hard for a farmer who has lived a lifetime on his land to sell it, but sometimes

the pressure to sell is great. Many farmers are squeezed out as property taxes in a growing area rise, as farm income drops, as new neighbors complain about farming practices and it becomes almost impossible to move their farm machinery from field to field on congested roads.

So, we have covered a few of the significant reasons why sprawl is occurring. There are many more involving governmental policies that actually encourage sprawl. Some of these include preferable tax treatment of home ownership (deductibility of home mortgage interest), auto subsidies (costs that drivers impose on society that they do not pay), property taxes (lower in the suburbs than the cities) and the big one, zoning.[19] It is often noted that although most people prefer an older-style small town atmosphere, most downtowns are now illegal according to modern zoning laws. Once all the rules have been followed, with set-backs, easements, ample and accessible parking and homes that are not too close to each other, what results is subdivisions and strip malls. As stated earlier, the reasons for sprawl are many and varied. We will now consider a few of the problems that sprawl creates.

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The first problem is the one that is most visible. There is definitely a change in the esthetic quality of the view once sprawl has occurred. What may have recently been a great view of a rolling hill covered with corn and soybeans, with trees, Queen Anne's lace and daisies at its edges, may now be a tract of inexpensive "cookie cutter houses," roads, sidewalks, cars and a strip mall with its parking lot. There is a loss here, both in tangible and intangible qualities. There is a spiritual loss in losing a view of the

countryside, of nature, and in paving over wild undeveloped areas to create a sterile "developed" suburb.

More pragmatically, there is a most serious problem, especially in northeastern Illinois, of losing some of the richest arable land in the world. This excellent black topsoil on flat prairie lands has taken centuries to accumulate. It is often shrugged off by those who favor development because there is plenty more land to farm elsewhere. There isn't – at least of this land's quality. The problem is that, for good reason, people have tended to settle in the best land. Because of the fertile soil and the good rainfall averages, the settlements in northern Illinois continued to thrive and expand. The rather ironic fact is that more than half of what America produces agriculturally is grown in the areas within or next to its cities.[20] Thus, according to a 1977 study, " the outward expansion of urban areas poses a threat to a disproportionate share of the U.S.A.'s prime farmland."[21] Dr. Richard Greene of Northern Illinois University's Geography Department, studying the farmland conversion process, concludes: "Metropolitan areas that straddle regions of prime farmland should be of special concern because of the impact of farmland loss on the nation's inventory of high quality farmland."[22]

Most farmland that is converted to urban use becomes residential – land covered with rooftops, patios, sidewalks and roads that are impervious to water. Rainfall is not allowed to soak into the ground but guided into storm sewers and waterways that are then prone to flooding. A downside to this way of getting rid of excess water leads to the depletion of the area's aquifers (wells must go deeper and deeper to find water) and a strain on local creeks and rivers in times of heavy rains. Often there seems to be no problem with flooding in a particular area – until a subdivision is built. And then,

or respect farming causes many to give up. And another irreplaceable farm, important to our environment, is gone.

After noting the problems of what has been lost to urban sprawl, we should also note some of the problems of the developments themselves. One of the main problems that most of us will notice as we try to make our way around the suburbs is congested roads. It has been argued that more roads are needed to relieve congestion, but many claim that that new roads merely fuel sprawl. The two go hand in hand and, according to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, "it is not altogether clear, however, whether road-building causes sprawl or merely accompanies it." It is thought that perhaps drivers respond to new roads by driving more since the creation of new roads often does not relieve congestion.[24]

Another problem concerns the isolation that occurs for some people that live in the suburbs. Without a car, a person in the suburbs is helpless and dependent on someone with a car. This includes kids who cannot drive, bored teenagers separated from their friends in other developments and elderly folks who may have lost their drivers licenses. Moms (and dads) are forced to become "taxi drivers" for their kids, spending a great deal of time driving them wherever they need to go. The poor and those who cannot afford a car also suffer in an area with no forms of mass transit. Often there is nowhere to walk to -- a store to buy milk, a community gathering place, coffee shop, public meetings. Modern developments, including subdivisions, appear to have "a single objective," according to Suburban Nation, -- "making cars happy."[25]

Many contend that suburban life keeps people withdrawn into their own homes, discouraging neighborliness or interest in public and community affairs. A large

perhaps, the homes or farms down the road are suddenly engulfed after a storm. In building a subdivision, farmers' drain tiles are often destroyed and water run-off in a field can severely erode the topsoil, damaging the farm's ability to grow crops.

An example is found in the farm that is next-door-neighbor to the recently opened Plainfield South High School. The farm, located on a ridge, slowly slopes downhill with narrow grass waterways to control soil erosion. A trickle of a stream that will feed into the East Branch of the AuxSable Creek begins on the property. Since the building of the new school, the water run-off outlet from the school campus has been guided onto the farm field next door, so that now, a field that has never before seen flooding often has a river running through it, using the grass waterways and digging new and deep channels. With more development starting on three sides – east, north and south – the farm owner wonders just how long the farm will be viable for farming.

Farms along the edge of suburbs and towns often find it hard to survive. Farmers tell of their troubles crossing highways that have become much busier. A farmer finds that in order to cross the road at all, he will have to pull out in front of somebody and inevitably get irritable hand gestures thrown at him. A livestock farmer on the edge of Plano near a "superstore" quips: "If Wal-Mart bags were fertilizer, I could make a living farming."[23] Before the fields can be tilled in the spring, much manpower must be expended to pick up all the litter and construction debris that has collected and been dumped. In the northeast corner of Kendall County, on one of the last dairy farms in the county, a prize-winning Holstein cow is injured when shot for sport from the busy nearby roadway. A farmer's litany of woes could go on and on. After many years of trying to make a living and earning very little, the hassle of trying to farm in a neighborhood that doesn't appreciate

subdivision may be divided into different governmental jurisdictions, different school districts or even annexed to different towns. There is often a loss of a sense of community, and of the feeling of the small town where everyone knows everyone else and neighbors care for each other. The loss of cultural cohesion and social interaction can take a psychological toll.

And last but not least of the problems of sprawl is the environmental degradation and desecration that often occur. Special places that almost no one wants to see disappear do disappear, perhaps only because a developer sees an opportunity to make some money. For an instance in Kendall County, one can go out to the eastern edge of Yorkville, near Route 71 and in proximity to Oswego. Bordering the Kendall County Historical Society and the Lyon Farm Forest Preserve lay a tract of virgin land covered with old and mature trees. In and about 1990, there was a flurry of public discussion concerning this hilly, wooded property close to the Fox River.

The land had been purchased years earlier by local individuals for investment purposes, who were thinking to sell many $100,000 lots for homes. Many local citizens were incensed at the thought of this beautiful place being bulldozed and many worked to preserve it. The Kendall County Forest Preserve made an attempt to purchase the land. Many area environmental experts testified that the land should be protected due to the many threatened and endangered species of plants growing in the pristine area. There were frequent letters to the editor on the subject – all to no avail. The Forest Preserve could not come up with anything near the amount of money the developers were asking for, which they claimed they needed as a return on their investment. In the year 2002, it seems lots are still being sold, allegedly with the stipulation that a limited number of trees

be cut down per lot. However, in the end, one of the last tracts of virgin land along the Fox River has almost disappeared, but will be remembered in the subdivision's name: "The Woodlands."

This kind of situation happens across America – where one local governmental agency tries to save land that should be preserved but a county board gives approval for development, rezoning farmlands and woodlands and wetlands to residential. In many cases there is an unwillingness of a local governing body to even look objectively at a given area, preferring to see only the tax dollars that a given tract might generate. One such situation recounted in Once There Were Greenfields (in the chapter "Paving Paradise") involves a rural area near a Civil War battlefield that is now a suburb of Washington, D.C.

> In Loudoun County, Virginia, north of Manassas, civil servants won a prestigious award from the American Planning Association for their comprehensive land use plan and another award for a local ordinance designed to maximize open space in rural areas by encouraging cluster development. But the county's pro-development Board of Supervisors nevertheless approved large-scale developments in areas of the county planned for preservation, rejected a study of the costs and revenues associated with growth and chose not even to evaluate a conservation organization's proposal to preserve the county's rural character with transferable development rights.[26]

This may be the saddest aspect of sprawl – when the powers-that-be put on their blinders, seeing only the value of green currency instead of the value of green fields and allow the destruction of America's greatest assets and heritage.

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While the problems are many, there are some possible solutions, granted that they may take years to implement. A most important response is needed from the government, especially at the state and federal levels. There is often a lag time between

recognition of a problem and acting to rectify the situation. While the need to protect farmland was beginning to be discussed in the 1970s, it wasn't until the 1990s that there was the first attempt to address suburban sprawl at the federal level. During the Clinton Administration, both the President and the Vice-president tried to generate some response to the perceived threat to farmland. Recently an important response was made at the federal level with the passing of the Farmland Protection Act in the spring of 2002. This act of Congress, signed by President Bush, commits one billion dollars to aid the preservation of farmland. This money will go directly to farmers to buy development rights to their land, assuring that the land will remain farmland in perpetuity. The one drawback is that it is a matching program; the states and local governments will have to come up with new funding, which is in most states non-existent or severely limited.[27]

The American Farmland Trust has been instrumental in pushing the Farmland Protection Act through Congress and in paving the way with programs that actually save farmland. Through educational materials and programs, AFT has been reaching out to farmers and concerned community members with some practical tools to fight suburban sprawl and the loss of productive farmland. AFT has recently initiated farmland protection projects in three northeastern Illinois counties: DeKalb, Boone and Kendall, all suffering from urban encroachment. The Kendall County group has just recently begun the process of forming and is still attempting to contact and interest stakeholders – those who have an interest in preserving county farmland.

Many studies have been made of the government programs that are intended to help farmers and protect farmland. Although the federal government has not been the leader in preserving farmland, it has in the past twenty years made some attempts. However,

most has been done at the state and county levels with incentive programs, agricultural districts, agricultural zoning and right-to-farm laws.[28] Also new on the scene and being found especially effective are the purchase and transfer of development rights. With the purchase of development rights (PDRs), the rights are sold by the farmer to an entity (e.g. a land trust) that then holds the development rights to the land in order to keep the farmland intact. If a farmer wishes to sell his or her land and its value as farmland is $3000 an acre, but worth $8000 an acre sold to a developer, the trust fund would pay the difference ($5000) to the farmer when he or she sells the land as farmland. The transfer of development rights program (TDRs) allows the development rights to be transferred to another location, such as in a nearby town, where the developer will be able to build at a higher density.

A study of the relative merits of preservation strategies has been done by Bryant and Johnston in 1992 in which they conclude that "the least effective strategies have been widely implemented and the most effective strategies hardly at all."[29] The least effective strategies, according to them, are the tax incentives (farmland is taxed at a lower rate than residential/developed land). Yet this is the most popular plan because it is "politically safe"; there is not much objection to farmers getting a tax break. The most effective tools for farmland preservation are PDRs and exclusive agricultural zones. But these are not popular because PDRs are costly for the government and exclusive ag zones are seen as usurping property rights (i.e. – the farmer is not allowed to sell his land to a developer for a better price). Non-exclusive agricultural zoning is quite prevalent and adopted at the local and county level. It is, however, of little use in areas where the pressure to develop is great. Illinois has enacted right-to-farm laws, which protect farmers from nuisance

lawsuits and allow standard farming practices to continue regardless of the complaints of new neighbors. Whether the objection is to machinery noise at night, the smell of manure being spread on fields or drifting field chemical spray damaging nearby trees, farmers need to be able to continue their regular farming activities to make their living off the land.

One of the most important things that can be done to preserve farmland and prevent suburban sprawl is to educate the public. A public that is aware of farmland issues becomes an educated voting public that is then capable of helping provide suitable solutions. City dwellers, suburbanites, townsfolk and the country dwellers themselves need to be aware of the importance to themselves of the nearby fields; the land is not simply waiting to be developed. It is providing their food, their water, their air quality and, quite often, contributing to their peace of mind. Important issues need to be addressed, now and in the future, with regards to land use issues.

One issue that is a problem in the state of Illinois (and many other states) is that a county can work very hard to develop a good land-use plan, only to have it ignored by a municipality that annexes into the county. An area zoned agricultural by the county can rapidly become part of a metropolis. Once land is annexed into a village or city, the county loses any authority it had to the annexing body. This can be very disheartening for a county that has spent much time and effort on a plan to preserve productive rural areas. A much more positive situation could exist if the counties and municipalities could work together in regional planning. Besides having some respect for county plans, it would also be beneficial if the municipalities themselves could learn to work together. Instead, what we often have are annexation wars where city boundary lines are disputed

and there are attempts to "land grab." In an area around I-80 in Grundy County, just south of Kendall, there has been hostility for years between the villages of Channahon and Minooka after Channahon annexed around Minooka to industrial land on the other side. They have recently signed an agreement. Plainfield and Oswego are working on their border agreements. There are hopes that once the municipalities in the southwest suburbs have their border pacts figured out, perhaps they could begin working together to solve the greater problems of the area.

The state of Illinois should be involving itself in these struggles, however. Its negligence in assisting counties to implement their land-use plans has been detrimental. Counties need to have their land-use plans given teeth and real authority or there is hardly any sense in making them. The state could also involve itself in greater efforts to save farmland. In order to utilize the funds provided by the federal government, it will have to. Illinois has some of the richest farmland in the world and it needs to take seriously its responsibility to protect it, for the sake of this generation and for the generations to come.

Changes will only take place when the voting public recognizes "dumb growth" for what it is. There may be much disagreement about what "smart growth" is, but educating the public about what the choices are is the key. The "pro-development-at-all-costs" officials can be voted out of office. The voting public should know that more houses will almost always mean higher property taxes. More houses will always mean more water consumption and often water shortages. More houses will always mean more drainage and flooding problems.More houses will always mean more congested roads.

States, and not just Illinois, need to make a concerted effort to pump money back into their central cities. Although it will not be easy, a state can choose to work on fixing the

problems of the city rather than funneling most of the money to the suburbs for new roads, schools and infrastructure. Perhaps President Bush's slogan "Leave no child behind" could be modified to be used again in another context: "Leave no city behind."

No one plan or solution will work for every community seeking to thwart suburban sprawl. But the public's informed decision-making is crucial. It is not necessary or given that we all must live in a suburb like all other suburbs – gated or not – with the requisite McDonalds, Wal-Mart and Walgreens appearing every few miles down broad stretches of highway. There are better ways to live and better ways to plan our communities. We have the tools available if we would use them. When the plans are carefully and thoughtfully made, there will be new and improved communities to live in, old and improved city communities to enjoy and plenty of countryside and farmland to keep us healthy and happy.

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